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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: review of mainstreaming in organizations of the United Nations system

Report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women on the elimination of violence against women

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith to the Commission on the Status of Women the report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women on the activities of the Fund to eliminate violence against women, which was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/166 of 22 December 1995.

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Implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/166 on the role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in eliminating violence against women

1. In resolution 50/166, the General Assembly requested the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to strengthen its activities to eliminate violence against women, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the recommendations set out in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. In doing so, UNIFEM is to work closely with the relevant agencies and bodies of the United Nations, as part of its system-wide efforts to eliminate violence against women. Under the guidance of resolution 50/166, the Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women was established in 1996; it became operational in 1997.

A. Inter-agency global videoconference on violence against women

2. In 1999 UNIFEM convened an inter-agency global videoconference "A world free of violence against women". Held on 8 March 1999, International Women's Day, the event linked the General Assembly with sites in Nairobi, New Delhi, Mexico City and Strasbourg (the European Council), and was broadcast to audiences worldwide via satellite and Internet technologies. The event highlighted successful strategies for addressing different forms of violence against women in different regions of the world, featuring women who have survived violence as well as advocates and policy makers who have been at the forefront of developing strategies to combat this universal problem. The videoconference focused on different forms of violence against women, in particular, aspects of domestic violence, including dowry-related violence and rape within marriage; threats to women's bodily integrity, such as female genital mutilation (FGM); violence against women in conflict situations; and economic violence, including the trafficking of women and girls.

3. The videoconference offered an opportunity at various levels to raise public awareness, promote public debate, establish new networks and partnerships, and seek governmental commitment to concerted actions for the elimination of violence against women. Response was positive and constructive — UNIFEM received hundreds of comments and messages from individuals and organizations. Thirty-seven Member States of the United Nations submitted statements reconfirming their commitment to eliminating violence against women. The videoconference enjoyed extensive media coverage, was broadcast in over 20 countries and was watched by hundreds of thousands of individuals around the world. UNIFEM produced two edited versions which were widely disseminated to United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. Through the preparatory process for the videoconference, global partnerships were strengthened within the United Nations system and in the public and private sectors, particularly with women's and human rights non-governmental organizations, the media and educational institutions. CNN picked up key messages, including a public service announcement showcased at the videoconference which it disseminated in over 100 countries worldwide.

4. Besides showcasing effective strategies, the videoconference also articulated future challenges to achieving women's human rights and eliminating violence against women. Furthermore it emphasized to the international community the importance of allocating more resources to efforts to eliminate violence against women.

B. Inter-agency regional campaigns

5. Inter-agency regional campaigns to eliminate violence against women, launched in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1997 and in Africa and Asia and the Pacific in 1998, have raised extensive public awareness to violence against women as a violation of human rights at the community, national and regional levels. The campaigns were spearheaded by UNIFEM with the active participation of other agencies of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, United Nations Volunteers, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the regional economic

commissions. Partnerships were also initiated with various governmental and non-governmental organizations, including central and local governments, criminal justice and law enforcement agencies, alternative and mainstream media, educational institutions, the donor community and youth organizations.

6. The campaigns have led to new pilot initiatives undertaken to address gender-based violence, including the establishment of zero-tolerance zones, the signing of community pacts to end violence, the appointment of regional rapporteurs against violence against women, the establishment of new forms of cooperation between police and women's crisis centres, municipality contests to showcase best strategies and programmes to end violence against women, and innovative media initiatives. In many countries, various forms of violence against women — the crime of "honour killings" for example — were for the first time brought up for public debate as a human rights issue, a public health issue and a development issue deserving national attention. The campaigns have contributed to mobilizing new political will which has translated into new legislative initiatives, strengthened enforcement, improved services for women survivors of violence, and an increase in allocation of resources to prevention and protection initiatives.

7. Some concrete results include:

(a) In Senegal, more than 45 villages made a public commitment to end female genital mutilation (FGM), and a presidential decree was issued, banning the practice of FGM;

(b) In India, posters illustrating women's human rights vis-à-vis the police were translated into 14 local languages and distributed to 40,000 police stations throughout the country;

(c) In Ecuador, representatives from seven countries in the Americas and Europe signed the Quito Declaration, which states their commitment to reinforced application of international and regional human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, and to putting an end to impunity for sexual crimes against women of all ages;

(d) Schools have for the first time introduced the issue of gender-based violence into their curricula;

(e) Men's public marches in different regions have contributed to an unprecedented involvement of men in actions and programmes to eliminate violence against women;

(f) The United Nations resident coordinator system has developed new programmes and increased allocation of resources to initiatives that address violence against women.

C. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women

8. The Trust Fund provides support to innovative and catalytic initiatives that seek to prevent and eliminate violence against women at local, national, regional and global levels. Since it began operating in 1997, the Trust Fund has received contributions from donors of over US$ 4.3 million, and funded a total of 88 projects around the world.

9. The projects funded apply any of the following strategies:

(a) Awareness-raising and advocacy on the issue of violence against women;

(b) Capacity-building for institutions and professional groups to improve prevention and response mechanisms and programmes to address violence against women;

(c) Legal literacy projects to ensure women's awareness of their rights and how to exercise them, in line with national legislation as well as regional and international human rights instruments;

(d) Gender-sensitivity training of governmental and non-governmental personnel, including police, judges, lawyers, health and social workers, teachers and media professionals;

(e) Innovative prevention initiatives, including projects focusing on youth education, community action and the involvement of men;

(f) Action-related research on emerging issues of violence against women, its causes and consequences.

10. In 1999, the Trust Fund received contributions of $1.2 million. The funds were allocated to 16 projects[1]

with the approval of the Inter-Agency Project Approval Committee (PAC). The Committee, which held its annual meeting in July 1999, included representatives from the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, WHO, and two representatives of non-governmental organizations working in the area of violence against women.

11. The 16 projects selected for funding in 1999 include:

(a) A project in Zimbabwe focusing on violence against women infected with the HIV/AIDS virus will educate women about sexual rights and HIV/AIDS, establish support groups for women who have contracted HIV/AIDS, and offer assertiveness training for women living with HIV/AIDS;

(b) A regional project in Asia will be working to develop a code of conduct for the media that promotes gender-sensitive representation of women in reporting, prevent stereotypical portrayals of women, and contribute to the elimination of violence against women in all forms of print, broadcast and electronic media;

(c) A project in Macedonia will support a first-time initiative to draft a new law addressing violence against women and will also facilitate an advocacy campaign for the enforcement of new laws and policies designed to respond to gender-based violence;

(d) A regional project in the Caribbean will raise community awareness on the issue of violence against women in six countries of the region (Jamaica, St. Vincent, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and Barbados), using art, music, dance and poetry to convey key messages;

(e) A global action-oriented research project will study violence against women resulting from forced eviction, focusing on the link between gender-based violence and violation of the right to housing. The project will support the establishment of an electronic list-serve on forced eviction to collect data on cases from countries around the world.

12. Based on lessons learned over its three years of operation, the Trust Fund has taken steps to strengthen its operations. Towards enhancing the impact and sustainability of funded projects the Trust Fund now supports not only small-scale projects but also medium-sized initiatives that are implemented over a longer period of time. In terms of substantive focus, based on inputs coming from the regions and from other partners, the Trust Fund is strengthening its focus on support for initiatives that address emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS, trafficking in women and girls, and violence against women in armed conflict. UNIFEM has also sought to further strengthen its cooperation with other United Nations partners working in the area of violence against women so as to make the Trust Fund a common asset of the United Nations system. These partnerships will be reinforced both at headquarters and in the field, building on the partnerships developed through collaboration on the inter-agency regional campaigns as well as on the videoconference. It is essential for the Trust Fund to mobilize additional resources so as to enable UNIFEM and its partners to strengthen its operation. UNIFEM calls upon both the public and private sectors to increase financial support of this unique international mechanism to eliminate violence against women.

13. At this time, a number of projects funded by the Trust Fund have already come to completion. In 1999 the Trust Fund learning component, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, focused on analysing the results of completed projects in the context of UNIFEM's overall work in this area, identifying effective strategies that have led to positive changes in legislation, improvement of services, and positive shifts in attitude. A forthcoming publication will showcase some of the lessons learned from the Trust Fund project portfolio as well as from UNIFEM's complementary activities to eliminate violence against women, focusing on the following strategic categories: community awareness; action-related research and legislation and related legal practices. The publication is designed to serve as a tool for organizations working at the grass-roots level and for donors interested in funding projects to eliminate violence against women.

14. In 1999, UNIFEM received a $1.2 million grant from the United Nations Foundation for a project devoted to ensuring effective documentation of initiatives to eliminate violence against women and the promotion of cross-regional learning and information-sharing. A strong capacity-building component specifically targets Trust Fund-grant recipients and is expected to enhance opportunities for sharing stories of

project achievements and challenges, using innovative media and communication technologies. The project additionally aims to facilitate the establishment of strategic linkages between media professionals and organizations working to eliminate violence against women, including the promotion of gender-sensitive reporting and representation of women. Initial interventions in Argentina and Nepal were approved in July 1999. A complementary project activity focuses on the development of a global database of effective media products and outputs from various regions that raise awareness to gender-based violence. As part of an advanced graduate course in development management, a team of Columbia University students have volunteered to help UNIFEM establish the database, and conduct an impact assessment of selected media products on attitudinal change in Ecuador, India and Kenya. The results of the analysis will be presented at the special session of the General Assembly meeting to assess the impact of the Fourth World Conference on Women in June 2000. UNIFEM is also focusing on building partnerships with non-governmental organizations such as Soroptimist International, Zonta International and the International Union for Local Authorities, in support of advancing the work to eliminate violence against women.

D. "End violence" virtual working group

15. In preparing the global videoconference, UNIFEM launched a working group on the Internet for discussing strategies to end violence. The group has served to identify successful strategies around the world for combating violence against women and girls. Since its launching, over 2,300 individuals and groups, with sizeable representation from both the South and the North, have actively participated.

16. One of the general conclusions drawn from the intensive deliberations over the past year is that the most effective approach to eliminating violence against women must be comprehensive and holistic, using multifaceted strategies that address the causes and consequences of violence against women in legal, political, economic, social, cultural and other relevant dimensions. No single strategy will suffice. Legal strategies, such as changing laws, are essential, but applying them alone is not enough to bring changes in practical terms.

17. The working group has compiled an inventory of successful strategies, which include:

(a) Application of international and regional human rights conventions and national laws, including laws related to criminal justice;

(b) Legal reform and introduction of new legislation;

(c) Mobilization and political advocacy;

(d) Training and education for officials, especially law enforcement officers, and for non-governmental groups in civil society;

(e) Service provision for women;

(f) Research and documentation;

(g) Using and influencing the media and communication technologies.

18. Other critical lessons emerging from the discussion include the following:

(a) The revision of laws must be accompanied by effective follow-up on implementation and enforcement and requires support through rigorous monitoring and an allocation of sufficient resources;

(b) Interventions to address violence against women are strengthened through effective collaboration between the judiciary, social service systems and non-governmental groups;

(c) Critical linkages between violence against women and other issues such as women's health and their economic and political rights must be factored into the development of effective policies and programmes.

19. The working group is currently contributing to the preparatory process for the five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women. An overall analysis of the discussions, soon to be completed, will inform the shaping of future directions and priorities of the working group.

E. Legal Advocacy: women's involvement in to the establishment of the International Criminal Court

20. In the context of its work to address violence against women, UNIFEM has been concerned with

ensuring that a gender dimension is appropriately integrated into the process of establishing an international criminal court. UNIFEM has provided support to the Gender Caucus for the Court, comprised of advocates for women's human rights who have been working to ensure that gender-related crimes are articulated in its basic documents and procedures and that appropriate mechanisms are introduced and effectively implemented to protect the rights of women living in situations of armed conflict. Efforts are continuing to raise public awareness of gender-related issues in the context of the ongoing work to promote early ratification of the Rome Statute of the Court, and to amend national laws pursuant to the Statute.

F. Conclusions

21. In 1999 there was an unprecedented growth in the scope and depth of UNIFEM's activity to address violence against women. Through concerted efforts, from the grass-roots to the global level, in many countries around the world, for the first time the silence on this universal problem has been broken. The inter-agency regional campaigns, the global videoconference, the innovative use of the media and new technologies, and the concentrated focus on building new partnerships, have broken new barriers. UNIFEM is committed to seizing this momentum through strategic follow-up programme initiatives. In order to enhance the impact and sustainability of UNIFEM's work, additional attention will now be focused on strengthening complementary linkages between UNIFEM's diverse interventions in the area of violence against women and women's human rights which is taking place at different levels and on fostering linkages with UNIFEM's ongoing work in the other two thematic areas — governance and leadership, and women's economic rights. UNIFEM will continue to nurture and facilitate partnerships with relevant agencies and bodies of the United Nations system and with external partners for advancing its work to eliminate violence against women, in the spirit of General Assembly resolution 50/166.

Notes

[1] Sixteen projects were selected for funding in 1999: Africa: Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe; Asia and the Pacific: Nepal, Thailand/Myanmar, Viet Nam and a regional project; Central and Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia; Latin America and the Caribbean: Peru, and two regional projects; global: two projects. Project descriptions are available on the UNIFEM web site: http://www.undp.org/unifem/trust.htm.